



Secure Rural Schools Program, 2008-2011

Overview

On October 3, 2008 the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (SRS Act) was amended and reauthorized in P.L. 110-343. This law ensures that for the next four years (2008 –2011), counties across the country can continue to count on stable and transition payments that provide funding for schools and roads, make additional investments in projects that enhance forest ecosystems, and improve cooperative relationships. With notable exceptions, the SRS Act, as amended, is similar to the original program. The structure and significant elements of Title I have been amended but Titles II and III remain intact with few changes.

Payment Options

The SRS Act gives counties the option between two payment methods. The payment options are (1) a newly modified 25 percent seven year rolling average payment of receipts from national forest lands or (2) a share of the State payment as calculated under the new SRS Act. The new formula uses multiple factors, including acres of federal land within an eligible county, average three highest 25-percent payment, and an income adjustment based on the per capita personal income for each county. Eight states specified in the Act¹ will receive transition payments for 2008-2010 instead of the new formula payment. These payments will be equal to the 2006 payment with approximately a 10 percent decrease through 2010. In 2011, the payment will be calculated using the new formula payment.

Counties electing to receive a share of the SRS State payment are bound to this decision through 2011. Those choosing the 25 percent payment are bound to it for two years.

Counties electing to receive a share of the SRS State payment and receiving over \$100,000 must allocate between 80 to 85 percent of the total funds to Title I (roads and schools). The remaining 15 to 20 percent must be set aside for projects under Title II and/or Title III or return 15 percent to the U.S. Treasury. Under the new SRS Act, counties receiving more than \$350,000 total payment cannot allocate more than seven percent to Title III projects, with the balance allocated to Title II or returned to the U.S. Treasury. Each county must notify the Forest Service of their allocation among titles by September 30 each year.

Title II – Special Projects on Federal Land

Counties electing to set aside funds for Title II projects should work with the Forest Service to establish Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) that will recommend how Title II funds should be spent. Title II funds may be used for the purpose of making additional investments and creating additional employment opportunities through, projects that improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure, implementing stewardship objectives that enhance forest ecosystems, and restoring and improving land health and water quality. Projects shall have broad-based support with objectives that may include, but are not limited to: road, trail, and infrastructure maintenance or obliteration; soil productivity improvement; improvements in forest ecosystem health; watershed restoration and maintenance; restoration, maintenance and improvement of wildlife and fish habitat; control of noxious and exotic weeds; and reestablishment of native species. At least 50 percent of all Title II funds must be used for projects that are primarily dedicated to road maintenance, decommissioning, or obliteration; or restoration of streams and watersheds. The authority to initiate Title II projects terminates on September 30, 2011. Funds that are not spent or obligated by September 30, 2012, will be transferred to the U.S. Treasury.

¹ California, Louisiana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and Washington.

Resource Advisory Committees

The SRS Act authorizes the use of RACs as a mechanism for local community collaboration with federal land managers in recommending Title II projects on federal lands or that will benefit resources on federal lands. The geographic boundaries of the RACs are determined locally by Forest Service officials in consultation with county and tribal officials and other stakeholders. The RACs are formed to ensure efficient and effective advice to Forest Supervisors and District Rangers responsible for approving and implementing the projects. Each RAC is assigned a Designated Federal Official to serve as the Forest Service point of contact.

RACs established by the original SRS Act and in existence before September 29, 2006, have been reappointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to a new four-year term.

The RAC's duties include reviewing proposed forest management projects in accordance with the SRS Act and making recommendations to the Forest Service and providing opportunities for interested parties to participate in the project development process. RAC duties have been expanded to include monitoring of project progress and making recommendations for appropriate changes to projects being monitored.

It is the Forest Service's responsibility to ensure that RACs are balanced and diverse with equal representation from industry, environmental groups, elected officials and local people as outlined in the SRS Act. RAC composition should consist of:

Category A

- Organized labor or non-timber forest product harvester groups
- Developed outdoor recreation, off highway vehicle users, or commercial recreation activities;
- Energy and mineral development interests; or commercial or recreational fishing interests
- Commercial timber industry
- Federal grazing or other land use permittee or represent nonindustrial private forest land owners, within the area for which the RAC is organized

Category B

- Nationally recognized environmental organizations
- Regionally or locally recognized environmental organizations
- Dispersed recreational activities
- Archaeological and historical interests
- Nationally or regionally recognized wild horse and burro interest groups, wildlife or hunting organizations, or watershed associations

Category C

- State elected official or their designee
- County or local elected official
- American Indian tribes within or adjacent to committee area
- School officials or teachers
- Represent the affected public at large.

Title III – County Funds

Title III projects are developed and selected by the counties. They should be advertised for 45 days to allow public comment. Proposed projects should also be sent to the RAC if one exists in the county. Title III funds may be used to carry out the Firewise Communities Program, develop community wildfire protection plans, and reimburse for emergency services paid for by counties and performed on Federal land (e.g. search and rescue, firefighting). There is a new requirement that counties allocating funds for Title III projects must submit a certification that the funds were used in accordance with Title III.

The authority to initiate Title III projects terminates on September 30, 2011. Funds not spent or obligated by September 30, 2012, will be returned to the U.S. Treasury.